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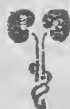


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THE ATHEIST

BY
GEORGE BEDBOROUGH



LONDON:
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37, GREAT RUSSELL STREET
BLOOMSBURY, W.C.
And at Letchworth
1919

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DEDICATED
TO
ANATOLE FRANCE
ATHEIST, GENIUS, AND
HUMANIST



THE ATHEIST

These rugged rhymes make no pretence as story,
Nor seek to celebrate a hero's glory.
The atheist whose life inspired my pen
Lived, at least outwardly, like other men.
'Twere vain his physical adventures to narrate,
More to his mental moods these lines relate.
He was not mad, nor bad
Nor often sad,
Some principles he had :
Not sown on every wind.
I cannot think he was a fool
Or even blind.
At school
As a rule
He made friends with the best.
For the rest
He was a boy like other boys
With their noise,
And sport.
Thought ?

Well, even boys have to think.
Of course they shrink
From all extremes,
Which only means
That courage is more common in our deeds
Than in our thought and in our word.
It needs
Something more potent than a soldier's sword
To speak those truths which all the world rejects ;
But the effects
Of universal silence or the general hate
Of truths unpopular most devastate
The minds of youth,
Where truth
Is natural in expression
But easy of repression.
My friend, at school,
Obeyed the general rule,
Parents and masters and the world were on one
side,
How could he think they lied ?
His doubts he tried to utter
If only in a stutter,
Till blamed
And shamed
He sacrificed his yearning
And gave himself to learning,
Till the days past
And at last
He was a man with a man's love of life,
Of mental life, which means eternal strife,
But also constant joy, the joy of striving
Against the stream though there be no arriving.

There is no pleasure known to man
Since man began
Which can compare with the exultant mind
In fullest exercise.
Foolish or wise
Mental activity brings curious sweets,
And pain deletes.
It gratifies
And satisfies
The deepest depths of man's persistent soul,
It keeps the body whole.
History, with Tennyson agrees
"We all are changed by still degrees.
That from discussion's lip may fall . . ."
A law to benefit us all.
Raphael's "Disputa" in the Vatican
Means more than Raphael meant, to modern man.
We seek for truth : we study and debate,
We must express our truth : small be it or great.
We, being men, must tell the things we think or
feel
As we struggle upward towards the truth ideal.
Earth yields its secrets, heavens open wide ;
To earnest seekers nothing is denied.

He knew the history of the Christian creed :
Its principles—in theory and deed.
Characterized at first by its ferocity,
Distinguished nowadays by nebulousity—
However fervently the Christian preaches,
Who knows exactly what he teaches ?
Christians were bitter persecutors in their day,
Witches, heretics and Jews their favourite prey.

Gibbon and Lecky read, and understand
How Christians loved when they'd the upper hand.
But times have changed our methods of dispute.
Some Christians now would hate to persecute.
The Christian faults to-day are incoherence
And zeal to show respectable appearance.

Some still hold true
The time-worn view
That an immortal God gave man a soul,
Indwelling and invisible, whose rôle
Is to return at death to God, the giver
(Or to the devil if an evil-liver).
Some think this soul (or spirit) is so near
That " mediums " can cause it to appear,
And from man's body is so separate
That soul (or spirit) can communicate
With son or daughter when the father's dead,
Because his spirit never dies, 'tis said.
This view's taboo to all of education
Who have outgrown such jejune explanation.
" Spirit " becomes a *word*,
A breath, a quivering chord
Of music, celestial, sidereal,
At least they will not call it mere material :
Poets write thus, Shelley amongst the rest,
The term is undefined, they mean the best,
Or the aspect most permanent, of man,
Or inspiration principal of all his plan,
Or that which quickeneth in intercourse
When the mere letter killeth in our discourse.
The spirit of a thing is just its essence,
The fragment indispensable, whose presence

Is said to be material or essential.
Thus if we follow reason consequential,
Material is spirit, spirit material.
The two are sordid, or both are ethereal.
But sham-fight phrases some disputants love,
Reasons and definitions they're above,
While verbal invidiousnesses like these
Enable them to argue at their ease.
To them "materialist" is just a label,
By artful use of which such men are able
To hint at our inferiority,
Implying their superiority.
The die is loaded 'gainst a just decision
When labels that condemn
Are tied to honest men,
And hyperbolic phrases kill precision.
But all professors claim for all their creeds
Religion still inspires all lofty deeds.
This claim embraces faiths of every kind
Which in all ages have debased mankind,
Not less than creeds whose aim is high and good :
This claim should now be better understood.
Despair inspires the stoic's moral plan.
Few men are stoics, and the normal man
Is moved by hope, by sympathetic care,
A sense of duty, love, desire to dare,
Need for expression, appetite or greed,
Evil or good impulse no less than creed.
Heredity, environment and chance
Our actions' inspiration may enhance.
To call this "faith" is a mere punning word,
And to confuse such "faith" with piety's absurd.

In spite of "free will" figuring in our creeds
Necessity compels most of our deeds.
Instinctive, self-defensive and reflex
Are springs of action which mankind perplex.
Hunger, disease, deformity, small brain
Impel a man to shun what gives him pain.
(Vain is our anger by our creeds inspired,
Love, sympathy and science are required.)
Health, knowledge, exercise and weightier brain
May strengthen impulses from higher strain
In thoughtful men, loving and brave and just,
Ready to die for man or cause they trust.

My friend rejected all the Christian creed;
Of gods anthropomorphic he'd no need,
Nor felt desire of penitence
He only sought for evidence.
He had no bias but he asked for proof :
Meanwhile he stood aloof
From creed. He let the chalice, let the Graël pass,
And watched with eyes of love the human mass.
He had to weep
Because men left their intellects asleep,
While a suffering world
Was hurled
Into its wars of hate
And trickeries of State.
He and a continent of men like him
Were forced as conscripts to war's horrors grim,
To fight wrong or right in conscripted might
For evil or good, for darkness or light.
And the best cause is as bad as the worst
When with misleading leaders we're curst,

Because the nation's mentally asleep
And lets the Government its conscience keep.
Men work, love, and weep oft, but shrink
From attempting to study and think.

From his travels and books he knew
That, except for a few,
Men and women were simple and kind,
For cruel revenge they'd no mind
At any rate
Without hate,
Except for foes
And for those
Who lived far away.
Little science had they,
Little art, not much light,
But a heart mostly bright,
Being honest and sound,
But around
There were journals which paid
For false tales to be made,
Or curtailed the fact,
Which, if served intact,
Would quite counteract
Editorial aims and interests base
(The bane of our race).
It was not only these,
There were statesmen who please
The lowest on earth
Nothing worth.
Public taste
Tends to waste

Not through criminal intention
But because a wise prevention
Is untaught.
Food is bought,
So is drink, by a sort of intuition,
With no heed of waste or malnutrition.
Lambs are slaughtered, calves are bled,
That our young may be ill-fed.
Fruit, nuts and cereals which might save man
Scarce find a place in his dietic plan.
In robbing birds of plumes and beasts of fur
We, charges of inhumanity incur.
Fed with flesh meats and clad in skins of beast,
Life and art suffer, and our health not least.
The price, not the art of our dress,
Is the anxious concern of our Press
Which will praise all that pays,
But denies its great prize,
To a beauty which won't advertise.
Its idol was Mammon immense,
It worshipped the thing of expense,
Not its worth, but its price or its cost,
While the best and the highest were lost.
Simple books of pure art were despised ;
On the Stage, only " Revues " were prized.
(He once said in his rage,
" On its last legs," the stage!
It could not be said
That it stood on its head.)
Art risks its life where the syndicates rule,
When cash is the *aim* instead of the tool.
The " Abbey," the " Vic," Miss Horniman's crusade,
And others show how drama can with art be played

Without great names, without finance immense,—
Appealing to our art, our wit, our sense.
Actors we have, great as in any age,
And fit (if few) great writers for the stage.

Of life and character art acts as test,
The best of nations love the art that's best.
Prize fights, loud jewels, and Lucullus feasts,
Transpontine dramas and performing beasts
Children beguile, and men with children's mind,
But in them sane men now no pleasure find.
Men's judgments in pictures, on books and the stage,
Are a proof of sound mind, of morals a gauge.
Our selections in fact are a vote,
And by our choice we our own worth denote.

None who loves letters, reading as he may,
Can blindly praise, or blindly curse, our day.
The fiction favour'd is by genius shunn'd—
Flabby and foolish as it is fecund,
Artless and graceless as a law report.

Reading a list of horses is called sport.

Humour is rare, except the circus kind,
None can deny this save the wilful blind.

But still the artist speaks, the poet sings,
And still neglected genius finds its wings.
Achievements fine come constantly to birth,
They only lack encouragement for worth.

False standards of dead creeds maintain their spell,
Blocking earth's new hopes with new fears of hell,
A hell called NOT RESPECTABLE, a hell
Where Rabelais, Boccaccio and Zola dwell,
Satire, Romance, and Realism's best
Surviving venom of dead creeds, attest.

Yet fearless authors by intrepid deeds
In time obliterate the sting of creeds.
They aim at writing simply as they feel,
Awful or lovely truths they must reveal,
To teach (unless, to teaching, art is blind)
Moral robustness of an active kind,
Not the THOU SHALT NOT of the priestly train,
But the more modern motto USE THY BRAIN.
But all who think, reasoners of every school
Can stimulate all students save the fool,
And as in youth he reverently read
The modern classics and the ancient dead,
My student friend hoarded his precious gains,
While he to study current thought took pains.
Unlike good Omar, whom he bore in mind,
With his own head he labour'd truth to find ;
He heard great argument, and evermore
He stay'd and sought to find another door.

Modern philosophers many he read,
Including pragmatic Bergson, who said
Expediency leads
Back to old creeds.
Willie James who in volumes thick defined
Truth and right as a phase of the mind.

Darwin, the perfect ideal of the student kind,
On facts established centred his rare mind.
A revolution evolution wrought
In all the widely scattered fields of thought.
Darwin loved truth like rich men love their gold,
Or as a bird the brood its wings enfold,
Welcomed new facts which changed his point of view,
Research restarting with the knowledge new.

Alfred Russel Wallace who Darwin raced,
And, first, from lowest types man's mother traced.
Gregor Mendel, **Biffen**, and their successors,
Were Darwin's interpreters and abettors.
Spencer, whose name we rarely now acclaim
(For this, our sense, and not his worth's, to blame),
His synthesis made Darwin's work complete,
Making assured theology's defeat.
Haeckel, the great "ensouled" materialist
(And even, once, "enrolled imperialist"),
"The Riddle of the Universe" he faced
And man's origin and nature truly traced.
Frazer makes clearer ancient mysteries now
Through folk-lore studies in "The Golden Bough."
Huxley, "Man's Place in Nature" helped to show,
But, best of all, he taught mankind to know,
We must seek Nature's justification,
Not by faith but by verification.

Bernard Shaw
Always saw
That all religions are one
(Perhaps one is equal to none);

But the Campbells were coming, he thought,
And when at the "Temple" he taught,
G. B. S. found a god, great but blind,
A Butler-cum-Nietzschean kind,
An influence acting through Shaw
By some Arnold-Wordsworthian law ;
But Campbell fell orthodox into the church,
Leaving "New Theology" quite in the lurch.
Let's hope Shaw, the most sane of our playwrights,
Has finished with these pious sham fights.
My friend owed much to Wells' persuasive pen,
Wells, the most prophet-like of modern men.
His tales and thoughts are vivid with conviction,
But Wells' "God" makes inferior fiction.
The God of our youth (without parts or passions)
Was subject to neither limits nor fashions.
This God Wells discards, and with confidence bold
He bravely faces the dilemma old :

That God is not omnipotent
Or He is not benevolent.

Wells' God just *means* well, like many more,
With *limits* involving the ills we deplore.
As mild a manner'd God as ever kill'd
By plague, war, wreck, or rack he never will'd.
An Invisible King, a Fire Undying,
Immortal Failure eternally trying.
Wells' God is like Wells, and this is not odd,
In his own image still does man make God.

By a study of deep-thinking Nietzsche
He thought he might finally reach a

Definite base for his mind ; not a goal,
He had no use for " a rest for the soul,"
A working hypothesis fitting the facts,
To justify life and its perplexing acts.
Nietzsche exposed stately seers where they lied,
But he proved of less use on the positive side.
Self must save self is his ultimate view,
But mankind is still damned, just saving the few.
A Calvin with wit, an Emerson artless,
An imperfect guide to life's continent chartless.

He studied **Henry James** and loved awhile
The cold perfection of that author's style.
Samuel Butler, Darwin's best critic,
Of modern authors the least parasitic,
Whose genius contemporaries missed,
Of mind and thought a subtle analyst,
His greatness was discovered very late,
(See Butler's *Note Books* page three sixty eight).
Maeterlinck's dream-plays are an attraction—
Consolation without satisfaction.
The artist, **Tolstoy**, hated art as such,
And loved all men—save men who love too much.
Aylmer Maude's translations, a literary joy,
A perfect classic make of anglicized Tolstoy.
Freud's curious books and Freud's disciples' tracts
Which fat conclusions draw from meagre facts ;
Psycho-analysis and all its schools
He studied with the aid of Pelman rules.
Havelock Ellis, while the theorists rail,
Marshals facts fearlessly which tell their tale ;
Ellis, with lucid English and pure style
Freshens dull facts and makes statistics smile.

His pupil **Walter Gallichan** attracts
 By thoughtful studies of some vital facts.
F. J. Gould, the veteran moral teacher,
 The R.P.A.'s most fascinating feature.
Archer in England brought Ibsen his hour,
Ibsen the genius of insight and power,
 Whose welcome amongst us was not very willing,
 Though some of his dialogue's "awfully thrilling."
 Mentor **McCabe, Cohen** (who well fills Foote's place),
Bottomley, the bourgeois type of John Bull's race.
 The gentle **T. E. Brown**, who scathing spoke
 Of God's "fool enigma" and "mammoth joke."
Beresford by convention isn't cowed,
 Of "Jacob Stahl" the author should be proud,
 "God's Counterpoint" a risky problem doesn't shirk.
 "These Lynnekers" remains by far his finest work.
John Davidson with sturdy powers poetic
 Possess'd as well uncommon gifts prophetic.
 Poet with new ideas, witty romancer,
 Artist and playwright, ideal necromancer.
Tagore's work has art and sometimes a meaning
 Which Western minds exercise trouble in gleaning.
H. S. Salt, who writes English uncommonly well,
 Formed a brave humane trio with Bell and Dobell.
 "Towards Democracy" "England's Ideal" is not set,
 And "Love's Coming of Age" has hardly come yet;
 But **Carpenter's** spirit the future will lead
 Wherever young thinkers are sowing good seed.
Ruskin was more than a teacher censorious,
 The honest sincerity of him was glorious.
 Here's one of his maxims of wisdom abundant:

"In Speculation the S is redundant."

George Meredith possessed a rugged pen,
 The public only reached him now and then.
 Count his ideas and weigh them, you will find
 No novelist e'er had more fertile mind.
 His poems prove the old contention wrong :
 That affluent brains won't blend with mirth and song.
Maurice Hewlett, enviable writer,
 In his best vein no writer is brighter,
 And for freedom there's no better fighter.
 In **Julian Grenfell** and in **Rupert Brooke**
 We lost young genius and a new outlook.
Pett Ridge, novelist, wit and true humorist,
A. C. Davies : tramp, poet, labourist,
Humphry Ward : who writes with a George Eliot touch ;
Eleanor Glyn : who writes ill and too much.
 Many **Conan Doyle** books are brimful of truth,
 And Sherlock Holmes is a masterly sleuth.
 Lately Sir Arthur has turned from his books
 To follow Sir Oliver spying out spooks.
 In a class by himself is **Algernon Blackwood**,
 All his stories are mystic—and some are quite good.
Allen Upward's the most disappointing of toilers,
 His " New Word " 's a classic, his others—pot boilers.
Lord Avebury, Bank Holiday's inventor,
 Charms us like Fabre and Darwin their mentor ;
 In print with grace he pressed his point of view,
 But the worst speaker platform ever knew.
Galsworthy, brilliant poet and writer,
 'Gainst social injustice an inveterate fighter.
Birrell, a proof that Dissenters have wit,
 He praises good style and he practises it.
Anstey, who writes good fiction for all ages,
 Forces home truths to warn and teach sages.

"London Nights" brought **Symons** well merited name,
His later work scarcely can add to his fame.
Zangwill, the Zionist, never a bore,
Explains "Israel" as none did before.
Mark Rutherford's simple, significant prose
Is neglected because it's so good, I suppose.
George Moore, sane artist, sound in heart and head,
As long as men love English his works will be read ;
Mudie may boycott, British matron shriek,
Moore is immortal ; let "Vain Fortune" speak.
Masefield has merits, sincerity's one,
But his pietist pathos is much overdone.

Gosse with many faults, "Q" with almost none,
Both love good writing and show how it's done.
Anatole France, wise, witty, romantic,
Informative but never pedantic ;
The Swift of our day, our Rabelais,
Spurring with satire the world on its way.
William Watson, who wanted a war with the Turk
To save further victims of Ottoman work.
Watson writes best when praising his peers,
And worst when his "God" who's "unknown"
appears.
Thomson (B. V.), whose music still rings true,
Thompson a papist and true poet too.
And still a third **Thompson**, Ernest Seton,
Who will not suffer by comparison ;
None e'er described the life of beast so clear,
Nor brought its heart the human heart so near.
Stanley Weyman, an author prolific,
Whose tales are like *Dumas'*—*magnifique*.

Hardy, wit, poet, novelist, playwright,
Still seems our youngest Herald of daylight.
While we read **Arnold Bennett** the war we forgot,
To him that's high praise : to us it is not.
Hugh Walpole, fine writer, good stories he tells,
He only fails when he imitates Wells.
On **Snaith** deserved success quickly thickens,
His best work is quite equal to Dickens.
Snaith's "Sailor" of football and sport gives a feast,
"Jordan Junior" is perfect, although it sells least.
Belloc writes jolly tales and keeps his hate
For Socialism and "the servile State."
Hall Caine, **Corelli**, **Garvice** ; all that lot
Are read by millions and—let's hope—forgot.
A.E. to whose best work the public's blind :
Perfect expression of a profound mind ;
What does his mysticism mean to me ?
Nothing ! In Russell's work art and new truth I see.

Nature, and newsmen, in a different way,
Abhor a vacuum which does not pay,
Selfridge's column is too often found,
The only literature for miles around.
Sometimes some weeklies have a purple patch,
For certain not the "People" or "Dispatch."
Blatchford fought Mammon with pathos and mirth,
Till patronised by Hulton and Harmsworth ;
Now weakly he curses foes to particles,
Rivalling Bottomley's "powerful articles."

"New" papers must be sought for something sage,
Witness **New Witness**, **Statesman** and **New Age**.

Literature, politics and science notes
 Earn the **New Statesman** all our literates' votes,
 Though once the Webbs of bureaucratic fame
 Play'd in its pages the *old* Statesman's game.
Orage the **New Age** song of sevenpence sings each week
 Of Nations' Guilds which to the Labour Party's Greek.
 His "Notes" are penetrating, full of sense. . . .
 I wonder when the *new age* will commence !
Hilaire Belloc and **Cecil Chesterton**
 With the **Eye Witness** good work carried on ;
Cecil, in arms, a gallant soldier died,
Gilbert new *weight* the **New Witness** supplied,
G.K.C.'s heart is as big as his body,
 His brain would match both if he discarded toddy,
 He's feared by all political swindlers ;
 Of freedom's fire he's one of the kindlers.
 The **New Commonwealth's** columns are giving a
 chance
 To **Henry** (and **Lloyd**) **George**, **God**, **Turf** and **Finance**.
New Europe very useful for its news—
 Its facts are more important than its views.

The **Statist**, honest, capable and bright
 On modern problems throws much welcome light.
 The **British Weekly** lives on **Nicoll's** name,
 (The herald of **Sir J. M. Barrie's** fame) ;
 But **Claudius Clear** has fallen far behind,
 And **Barrie's** second will be hard to find.
 The **Freethinker** for nearly forty years
 Has bravely held the course **Cohen** now steers,
 Boycotted, prosecuted, persecuted, banned,
 A beacon to thinkers 'tis in every land.

"The greatest of causes," George Meredith said,
 Is the cause which the "Freethinker" ever has led.
The Tablet's like Oxford, not in culture be it said,
 But as the home of every cause that's dead,
The Spectator gets duller every year,
 Strachey will surely soon be made a peer.
The Outlook for letters has really a soul,
 But depresses our spirits too much on the whole.
 Dora Marsden writes well and so do her friends,
 But **The Egoist** sometimes to crankiness tends.
The Literary Guide creates itself a name,
 Heralds the R.P.A.'s increasing fame,
 A guide to books of an agnostic bent,
 Can praise or blame, but not misrepresent.
The Cambridge Magazine does one thing well,
 The world's opinions it essays to tell,
 Chauvin fanatics curse, true patriots bless
 Its "Weekly Survey of the Foreign Press."
Common Sense, a journal living up to its name ;
 All disturbers of peace (good or bad) get its blame.
The Nation (once the "Speaker") runs its course,
 The friend of freedom and the foe of force,
 One-sided, rather preachy, pacifist,
 Well-written, well-edited, Asquithist.
 Garvin from dulness the **Observer** lifts,
 Sims in the **Referee** in small jokes drifts.
 In **Sunday Telegram** new lines begin,
 It filled a gap but wears a little thin.
 Sunday journals perhaps as penance are sent,
 Their dulness is part of our sins' punishment ;
 Though with vices and crimes their pages are reek-
 ing,
 British virtuous prestige these chauvins are shrieking,

War eternal and bloody, these patriots teach,
Like most parsons' the journalists' rôle is to preach.

My atheist friend I never could ask
To hear many preachers—an inhuman task.
He visited churches of all kinds of schools,
And heard a few wise men and hundreds of fools.
Ascetics, some heroes, chaplains “doing their bit,”
Saints, sneaks, prudes and drunkards, and a few men of
wit.

The **Bishop of London**, often abusive,
Urges poor parents to be less Malthusive,
But shattered are the theologians' hopes,
A wiser public studies **Marie Stopes**.

Father Stanton, cleric of a different trend,
Made chiefly friends with those who had no friend ;
Love all his life, love at his death one sees,
He made “the undeserving poor” his legatees.

Annie Besant : tolerant theosophist,
Orator unique whom few can quite resist,
Although absurd her occult claims we rate,
Her zeal in human welfare is as great.

“Christ Scientist” churches are many already,
Based on the book of **Mary Baker Eddy**,
Pain, disease, death, they say do not exist,
Yet funerals and wooden legs persist.

A Mussulman Mosque looks strange at Woking,
Missions to “native” Britons, most provoking,
“Lo the poor Indian” now has his diversion,
He pities us and prays for our conversion.

Bernard Vaughan harps on the “Sins of Society.”
Divorce he regards as sheer impropriety.

Priests are a third sex, said profane Voltaire,
But in his day **Maude Royden** wasn't there ;
She puts male priests second in eloquence ;
They've all her myths without her graceful presence.
The eloquent **Chapman** (Savoy Chapel Royal),
Sincere and human, friend of all who toil.
Dean Inge, called " gloomy " whose wise words and
books
Should be studied by him who for man's progress looks.
Headlam the liberal of St. Matthew's Guild ;
Henson the modernist—a bit self-willed ;
Jowett the journeying divine, **Clifford** the Baptist bore ;
Campbell now " doctored " by the church, and many
more,
Even to **Stanton Coit** in pulpit and position,
Who only seeks episcopal recognition.
Synagogues, churches, mosques and temples thrill
With eloquence—but never seem to fill.
Varied their influence, various their note,
" All very human " is the final vote.

Amongst the living and the dying creeds,
Amongst men's books and thoughts and lives and deeds,
My friend sought patiently with eager will
To find essential truths remaining still.
He found, as every honest student finds,
Some common basis which unconscious binds ;
Help comes not from pretending to believe
Ideas which children in good faith receive.
Creeds cannot survive by preachers' fame,
Nor by the magic of their founders' name,
Nor by the lofty nature of their claim,

Nor by their ancient persecutors' shame,
Nor even by the good at which some aim.
How can creeds give us truth if at their base
Patent untruths still occupy their space?
Untruths defended just to save the face
Of creed, church, priest abandoned by the race.
And yet in every creed, however weird,
In every church that man to heaven has reared,
In every bible human beings wrote,
In every song made from the human note,
In every movement of the human mass,
Religious phases through which nations pass,
There is some good, some truth, some precious seed
Which finds expression in a fervent creed ;
The enemies of human good and truth,
The stranglers of the honesty of youth,
Are those who palter with our early doubt
And chloroform the will they can't cast out.
The lies from which religions ne'er shake free,
Cling like the lichen to a dying tree.
History has seen the deaths of countless creeds,
Most of them strangled in their own dead weeds.

My friend the atheist was an optimist,
Man was to him a social alchymist.
Man's potent love with widespread human skill
Eradicates or palliates each ill.
Silent and powerless are all the gods—
The muses cease to sing when Homer nods ;
Yahveh's power wanes when Moses' hands sink down ;
When men cease at the pumps the sailors drown.
How can a God require a man's assistance,
Merely to demonstrate His own existence ?

There are a myriad mysteries in the universe,
A god would only make the riddle worse,
More complex, more mysterious, less sane,
A personal equation to explain.

The fear of death has built prodigious creeds,
The fear of death all superstitions feeds.
Death, the dread anarchist invincible
(In no sort monarch constitutional).
Death hurls his bombs, of route irrelevant,
Results ignoring, terror's his element.
Babes at the breast, the strong man in his pride,
The wanted mother and the hopeful bride
Oft are his victims, while he bids to stay
Some for whose death a good man well might pray.
Careless of ethics and to reason blind,
Eternal enemy of all mankind.
And stoic wisdom fortifies our wills,
Bravely to face inevitable ills ;
Yet death's dread hand still strikes its felon blow,
Our loved ones die—and that is all we know.
Because death's welcomed by a wretch outworn
(Some sick incurable or waif forlorn)
Man's native sentiment towards death's confused,
And poets' " Rhapsodies to Death " excused,
All vain our words, our visions vague are vain,
Vain bribes of endless bliss, threats of hell's pain ;
But tears of sympathy are never vain,
Nor human hands with love relieving pain,
Nor all the human intercourse of grief
In which men share, and sharing, find relief.

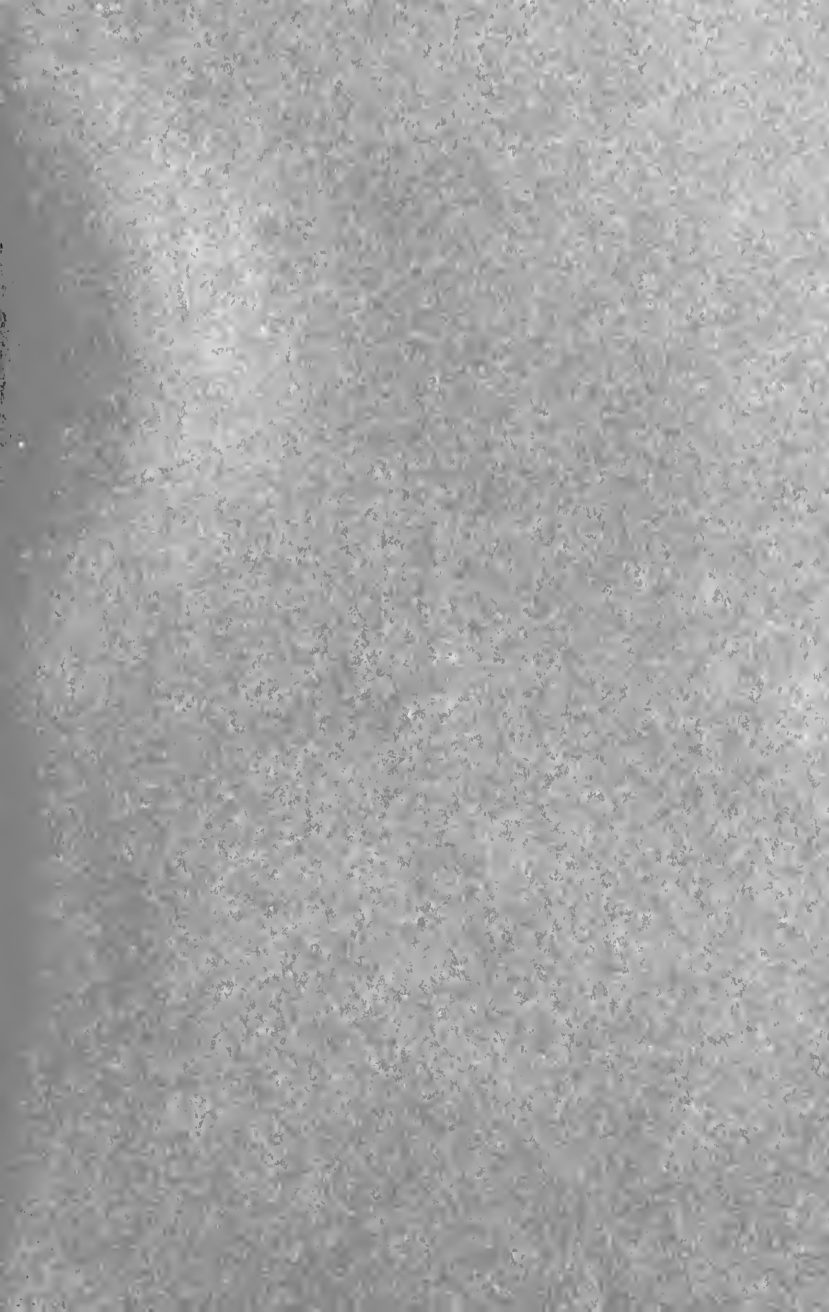
My friend's life-battle on the field of thought,
Loving concern for human effort brought.
For human errors, guesses, doubts and creeds
Are human and respond to human needs.
His disbelief in all the heavenly band
Bade him more quickly grasp the human hand,
Opened his heart to all the human blend,
And turned his eyes to Man : man's only friend.
The smallest deed that man has done for man,
Has helped man more than " God's Redemptive Plan."

Man is a searcher from his earliest youth,
Steadily digging in the mine of truth,
Plumbing deep seas, exploring unknown tracts,
Facing new perils, to attain new facts,
Seeking a balm for every natural ill,
To Nature's force opposing human will.
Man says " Let there be light," and though, for years,
He toil unceasing, light at length appears.
His Eden is an efflorescent wood,
Where trees of knowledge bear his daily food.
No quails or manna come down from the Lord,
Man sows, and reaps the harvest as reward.
By knowledge not by faith man rides the sea,
And makes from chaos all the world to be.
Wisdom but means to use our knowledge right,
Wisdom is human knowledge at its height.
To feel is just as human as to know,
Emotions' streams from human sources flow,
Evil and good denote the moral plan
By which man judges between man and man,
Of man's relationship to God, the base
Has neither logical nor moral case.

Knowledge, like money, is held by too few,
And we need to-day some method anew
For wider diffusion by tongue and pen,
Till all that men know is known by all men,
Till all our problems we face undismay'd ;
Of general ignorance no more afraid ;
With brain-forged weapons opening new ways,
Leading a world to wise and happy days.
Wisdom and happiness, my friend thought, then
Would be the common heritage of men.
Where intellectual happiness we find,
There virile virtues vitalize mankind.
Knowledge must be in commonalty spread,
Till education common is as bread,
Till mankind's masses, of unreason rid,
Shall think and speak and act at reason's bid.
Early my friend found that in every age,
Pioneer, poet, scientist or sage
For truth had witnessed, careless whether press
Or crowds or pulpits called it wickedness.
They fought for truth when truth was slandered most,
Exiled or trampled by a hardy host.
Fruitful their searches, not in vain their fight,
To them we owe all we possess of right,
It was not always for great truths they fought,
They found small truths oft when great truth they
sought :
Noble-souled thinkers, what we owe to thee !
Who died for truth, suffered for liberty,
Or lived as simple students in truth's quest,
Refusing what the world would call its best.
They lived, some truths to search for, find, and give,
Truths living, creative, restorative ;

Great truths and small, our mental life's supply,
Pure pearls, man's mind to adorn and dignify.

Amongst the truths the atheist found one
About a truth whose life has just begun ;
A truth a child perhaps might learn at school,
A truth that all philosophies might rule,
A truth that comes from love and aims at light,
To kill intolerance and illumine night,
Give wisdom courage, open eyes once blind,
Unlock a gate of hope for all mankind. . . .
And yet a modest truth that seeks in sooth
Just hospitality with other truth.
Here is the message of the atheist,
Ever to me a true evangelist:—
That whoso bares a truth must bear the pain
Of its conception, and if this is plain,
Must honour his own child and ne'er forsake,
Neglect its interest or cease to take
Its part against the world. He must not heed
Crowds who would hide the truth they cannot breed ;
Truth cannot of authority be born,
Nor grow where old men treat new truths with scorn.
Truth is not always fair, or soft of speech,
Nor can all minds grasp all that it can teach ;
But if despised, by men rejected now,
The future's dawn illuminates its brow.



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